

Obama Ready For Lame Duck Presidency

by GLENN THRUSH & CARRIE BUDOFF BROWN | [POLITICO](#) | NOVEMBER 3, 2014



Barack Obama is antsy. His aides can see it when he alights from Air Force One from the all-too-occasional campaign trips he has taken this fall. There's a sigh, an unhappy-camper body language when he finds himself back in the depressing slipstream of Ebola confabs and national-security-crisis-of-the-day meetings. The vibe, according to people in his orbit, is not so much of being checked out as of being fed up.

"[I] do like campaigning. ... It's fun," Obama said on Thursday, speaking wistfully at a rally for Democratic gubernatorial candidate Mike Michaud in Maine. But the Michaud event was the exception, not the rule. "There have been \$2 billion in ads shitting on the president and no one to defend him," a senior administration official told us. "He is very fired up to get this campaign behind him, to run through the tape."

Obama, for so long the man with the bright future, has hated being relegated to a sidelined pariah in the midterms—even if it is the inevitable lot of a second-termers with approval ratings hovering in the low 40s—according to a dozen current and former Obama advisers we spoke with in recent days. He both resents the narrative that he's basically irrelevant and doesn't much relish the fact that many of his longest-serving staffers, the remnant core of his once-buzzing and brash White House, are strapping themselves to ejector seats. More than anything, Obama's loathing for Washington, an attitude that reads as ennui to outsiders, has hardened into a sullen resignation at being trapped in a broken system he failed to change, advisers told us.

"I sense a certain fatalism there, and it's disturbing," says a former adviser on Obama's campaign who, like many others we talked with for this story, requested anonymity. "There's a sense that 'I've tried everything, and look where it got me.' People misread it as disengagement. It's frustration. But who cares? It's a bad mind-set." Another Obama veteran adds, "the bully pulpit is gone, maybe forever."

Administration officials tell us that Obama's political and policy teams are planning a big counterattack if the Republicans win the Senate—introducing a slate of legislative proposals and executive actions on immigration, infrastructure and early childhood education that are popular with the Democratic base and that he will dare the GOP to oppose. Time

and history, however, aren't on his side. The six-month period between Election Day and next summer is likely the last chance for Obama to make his mark before the 2016 presidential campaign to succeed him really kicks into high gear. But the implacable opposition of a GOP that has turned him into his party's albatross and his own hard-to-pin-down state of mind cast doubt on a major comeback.

Many are convinced he has already given up, more or less. "He appears tired," says Sen. Bob Corker, a Tennessee Republican and one of the few in his party who sees himself as a potential dealmaker in a GOP-controlled Senate. "It is almost as if he is wishing for a six-year term instead of an eight-year term," added Corker, who would ascend to the chairmanship of the Foreign Relations Committee if Republicans win the chamber. "But if he can get motivated and reenergized, I think this is a tremendous opportunity for the country."

Obama and his team, gearing up for one final fight, say they are intent on not throwing away the next two-plus years. West Wing officials concede that Obama is weary of the endless partisan combat and the unrelenting six-year GOP strategy of attack, but they insist he has absolutely no intention of embracing his inner lame duck. "I'm not sitting here blithely telling you we are as awesome as we can be," said one of Obama's top aides, laughing at his own understatement. "We've done a lot of good things this year but not as many as I would have liked. ... We know we're in for a shit storm if we lose the Senate. You have to gird yourself mentally 'cause you are going to come out on the other end.

"But," the official added, with a glint of actual optimism, "you hit bottom, and then you have the Obama comeback story."

It's hard to see that comeback just now, what with Obama's slow-footed responses to an array of crises and forehead-slapping lapses like his decision to play 18 holes of golf after issuing a statement condemning the American journalist James Foley's decapitation by Islamic State militants in August. Circumstance and the innate power of the presidency could provide Obama with unanticipated opportunities, but even his closest friends are fretting about Obama's willingness to make the changes necessary.

OBAMA IS A LAME DUCK



You know it's bad when Obama message man emeritus David Axelrod, who almost never utters a negative word about his former boss, was publicly [lamenting](#) to Bloomberg *Businessweek* last month, "There's no doubt that there's a theatrical nature to the presidency that he resists. ... Sometimes he can be negligent in the symbolism."

The historical record provides few encouraging examples. George W. Bush, whose stumbles, of course, gave rise to Obama in the first place, offers the most hopeful recent case of a late-in-the-game turnaround, though it's not exactly a feel-good story. After he had lost the country's backing over the handling of the Iraq War, Bush fired his Pentagon chief, took a far more active role in the management of his White House and appointed a new chief of staff credited with rationalizing an often chaotic chain of command that had given disproportionate power to Vice President Dick Cheney. Then again, just as Bush seemed to be regaining his footing, the economy collapsed.

Bill Clinton approached the end of his presidency on a high note, standing at a 62 percent approval rating at this point in his tenure, while Obama today hovers in the 39-to-44 percent range. But times were so different as to render any comparison virtually useless: Republicans were perceived to have overreached by impeaching Clinton in the Lewinsky scandal, a move that alienated moderate swing voters, and Clinton benefited from a booming economy. "Congressional districts were a lot less polarized than they are now, and we had a bunch of Republicans who were desperate to make deals after overreaching on impeachment," says Joel Johnson, who served as a Clinton strategist during the last two years of the administration.

Obama's own reactions to the 2010 and 2012 elections offer signals on how he will proceed this time. After the 2010 elections, when Republicans took over the House, he tacked hard to the right, adopting the GOP agenda of deficit reduction and sealing a significant, albeit controversial, deal with Republicans to extend Bush-era tax cuts in exchange for an extension of unemployment benefits. After his 2012 reelection, he made a brief and ineffective stab at bipartisan congressional outreach and then rammed through a landmark tax increase that hiked rates for families earning more than \$400,000. So far, that's been the highlight of his second term. There might be other, more modest, deals to be had in this year's lame-duck session of Congress, scheduled to begin later this month, but housekeeping items are more likely to dominate: clearing a backlog of nominations, extending government funding, considering Obama's pick for attorney general.

Still, Corker said the president has a "golden opportunity" because some Republicans, like himself, are eager to prove that GOP control of both houses would create a more productive environment than the past four years of divided rule. "If he wants to leave a legacy of solving some of our nation's issues, Tuesday could be the best thing that happens to him—if he has that attitude of wanting to do that and puts out the effort to make that happen," Corker says.

But just as Republicans don't trust him, neither Obama nor his top aides trust Republicans to work in good faith. Bringing in someone who could work well with congressional Republicans isn't an idea that's getting much traction in the West Wing, even though several people we interviewed suggested a big-splash hire—such as tapping former Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle for some get-it-done-on-the-Hill job. (It's a long shot, we were told, not least of all because Daschle [launched](#) a new consulting firm just last week.)

A comeback of sorts is not an entirely crazy scenario: If there's one thing Obama has proven as a politician, it's that he does a lot better during a presidential election cycle than a midterm cycle, and the calendar is about to flip. Obama's advisers (and a lot of other Democrats) believe Republican excess and the presence of a common enemy—an emboldened GOP leadership in both houses that won't be able to resist the rightward pull of the Tea Party—will unite Democrats behind Obama in a (non-scandal-induced) version of the resurgence enjoyed by Bill Clinton.

“It is important to recognize in this election a tiny fraction of voters will vote in a handful of states that are terrible for the president,” the senior White House aide said. “There are like, two Americas—there is a midterm America and a presidential-election-year America. We would be making a big mistake, heading into a presidential election year where we are not on the ballot but our party is, to make a whole series of strategic decisions based on the politics of an electorate that will not exist two years from now.”

There’s more than a little truth to that argument: In 2014, embattled Democrats in the House, Senate and state houses could and did evade and bash their party’s leader. But in 2015 and 2016, Democrats with national aspirations, like Hillary Clinton, have to embrace Obama’s record if they hope to retain a Democratic Party core of voters who have stuck with Obama through the first-term battles and second-term disappointments.

Nevertheless, the mobilize-the-base philosophy that has defined Obama as the transcendent campaigner of his generation haunts his presidency, severely limiting his range of public support now, when he most needs to tap a wider reservoir of goodwill. Since the losses in 2010, when the Tea Party revolt redefined the game, Obama’s politics-and-metrics team has essentially conceded that he will never be able to capture anything approaching broad public support. At the start of his presidency, about 35 percent of Republicans and independents personally liked him and were willing to give him a chance. In 2014, that number is approaching the vanishing point, at around 10 percent.

The Obamaians call it the “low-ceiling/high-floor” phenomenon: With some fluctuation, Obama enjoys low-to-mid-40s support from the electorate (the Democratic base) and cast-iron mid-40s opposition from conservatives *no matter what he does*. In 2012, that reality catalyzed his campaign’s already robust voter mobilization efforts geared at maximizing turnout of his supporters, as opposed to selling Obama to an ever-shrinking middle of persuadable undecided voters.

But those numbers are now crushing his presidency, like the converging trash compactor walls in *Star Wars*, forcing him into a narrower political space than that occupied by presidents of the past. “We’ll never see 51 percent again, maybe not even 50,” predicted one of his former campaign aides.

If there’s a ray of hope—and this is the paradox of a late-stage 21st-century presidency—it’s that people will start ignoring him.

Veteran Democratic pollster Stan Greenberg says Obama’s secret weapon just might turn out to be Hillary Clinton—who could divert attention from the White House and allow him to attack multiple crises without the klieg-light scrutiny he has faced in the past. “Once Hillary becomes more important than Obama, the attention shifts,” says Greenberg, who helped advise Clinton’s husband. That’s a good thing, Greenberg argues, because Obama and his team have been so lousy about messaging what he believes to be a fundamentally competent and accomplished presidency. “I think there might be a shift to the job *he’s doing* versus *what he’s saying about the job he’s doing*. ... That’s important because he’s demonstrably failed on communicating about his economic plans and on his health care reforms and on his environmental record—everything really,” Greenberg says. Scathingly, he concludes: “No one knows about any of it. ... There is no part of that he has been successful at.”

So will he fire anybody? And can he still get anybody worth hiring to work for him? Already anticipating a bad election night, many Democrats and the TV pundit class have begun howling for a West Wing housecleaning, even if Obama shows no signs of doing so—though a Tuesday wipeout could change that thinking in a hurry.

For now, White House officials insist he won’t indulge in a ritual that they essentially equate to a sugar high for their critics, pleasing but fleeting. “That is not going to happen,” a senior administration

official told us when asked if Obama was preparing a major staff shakeup. If anything the circle is tightening: Even central players like Axelrod, former White House senior adviser David Plouffe, Obama's most trusted political adviser and Ex-Press Secretary Robert Gibbs—once the core of his team—have been talking to Obama less and less, and weren't consulted on the new plan to pivot, according to a former administration official.

Yet the change is occurring whether Obama likes it or not. Many of the relatively few remaining stalwarts on the White House staff are exhausted, eager to resume normal lives and leaving. White House chief of staff Denis McDonough asked senior aides around Labor Day to tell him if they are going to stick around for the final two years, and he has been reaching out to possible replacements since then. Among those mentioned as likely departures are some of Obama's closest aides: senior adviser Dan Pfeiffer and deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes. Senior counselor John Podesta, who committed to staying only a year and is expected to play a major role in Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign, is scheduled to leave after the elections as well.

A list of people most likely to replace the departed isn't easy to draw up, not with the lure of a Clinton campaign, big cash in the private sector, the perception of insularity and resistance to outsiders and the run-of-the-mill reality that winding down a presidency is a thankless, enervating business. Over the summer, many West Wingers and Obama alums believed that the president's former senior adviser David Plouffe, Obama's closest political aide, was primed to return as chief of staff. Plouffe forcefully denied the rumor to anyone who asked—and recently took a highly compensated job as a senior executive with Uber, the on-demand car service.

“One of the problems with a White House late in the second term is you're not getting the A team,” said Martha Joynt Kumar, a Towson University political science professor and expert on the presidency. “You have weak people in positions and a lot of pressures at the very end.”

White House officials acknowledged that attracting top talent will be a challenge, but they pointed to the return of Ron Klain, a former chief of staff to Vice President Joe Biden who is now Obama's Ebola czar, as evidence that the president is still a draw. (Klain is eventually expected to move into the job held by Podesta or Pfeiffer, if he leaves.)

Yet even the Klain hire offers a glimpse into the dysfunction that hampers Obama as he heads into the homestretch. Klain, according to several current and former Obama insiders, was passed over twice for White House chief of staff because Obama wasn't quite willing to admit him to the innermost circle of trust. For a brief period in early 2013, Klain had the inside track for the job over McDonough, but he was done in over concerns that he had leaked private conversations with the president to journalists—including an unflattering blow-by-blow of a 2012 debate prep session that appeared in *Double Down* by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin. (Klain and White House officials declined to comment for this story, but he has denied those charges to Obama's staffers.)

Whatever his previous misgivings, Obama—at the urging of his former chief of staff Rahm Emanuel and others—decided that Klain was simply too talented (and necessary) to keep outside the building at this point.

But Democrats close to the White House argue that there need to be many more Klains, not just to replace empty slots, but also to restock Obama's inner circle with the kind of fiery, assertive, contentious advisers who energized the presidency—and the president—during the first term.

As one former Obama aide said, “It's good they are opening the process up, but isn't it too little, too late?”

Obama Diverted Funds From Fighting Ebola

by MELISSA QUINN | [THE DAILY SIGNAL](#) | NOVEMBER 3, 2014



Seeking a more robust defense in the event of a bioterrorist attack on the United States, the Bush administration created a \$6 billion fund to prepare the nation for such threats, including the deadly Ebola virus.

The Obama administration, however, has not used the range of tools and budget provided by the post-9/11 project, focusing instead on only three targets and diverting at least \$1 billion to other priorities, a review by The Daily Signal found.

Nearly five years ago, in fact, the administration's own biodefense science board warned that project funds "should not be diverted to support other initiatives, regardless of the merit of other purposes."

Repeated diversions of funds "raise doubts about the intention of the U.S. government to consistently fund the enterprise," the science board adds.

The government's use of money from the program, Project BioShield, for other purposes also comes under question in a recent report prepared for Congress.

Oversight from lawmakers could help ensure the money is spent "in a manner consistent with congressional intent," the report says.

Of \$3.3 billion budgeted under Project BioShield over the past decade for medical countermeasures to Ebola and a dozen other "material threats" identified by the Department of Homeland Security, fully 90 percent — \$3 billion — went to address only three: anthrax, smallpox and botulism.

>>> [Those Ebola Vaccines in Testing Now? You Can Thank Dick Cheney for That](#)

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government put safeguards in place to protect the country from terrorists using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons.

This is the story of Project BioShield. Just one key initiative within the Department of Health and Human Services, the project had Ebola — among other sources of bioterrorism — in its sights for more than four years under President George W. Bush.

In September 2006, then-Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff called Ebola a "material threat against the United States population sufficient to affect national security."



But the Obama administration decided to take Ebola off Project BioShield's hit list even after President Barack Obama singled out the virus in his second official State of the Union address.

Products currently in development to combat Ebola are in early stages and thus cannot be funded through Project BioShield, an HHS spokeswoman told The Daily Signal.

No one could have predicted in 2010, perhaps, that more than 4,500 would die so far as a result of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa — or that four people would become infected in the U.S.

However, officials in both the Bush and Obama administrations clearly saw the potential threat in the deadly virus.

As vice president, Dick Cheney was the driving force behind Project BioShield. (Photo: The Heritage Foundation)

Creation of Project BioShield

In the wake of 9/11, Vice President Dick Cheney [pushed](#) for additional measures to protect the United States from bioterrorism.

Addressing his concerns, Congress [passed](#) a measure creating Project BioShield, an initiative spearheaded by Cheney. It allocated \$5.6 billion to buy, develop and store drugs for use in the event of a bioterrorist attack.

>>> [Ebola Preparedness: Yearning for Yesteryear](#)

The law creating Project BioShield allowed the government to purchase vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics already in the advanced development phase.

It also gave the National Institutes of Health, specifically the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the authority to speed up and simplify the awarding of grants and contracts for developing medical countermeasures against bioterrorism.

Providing financial backing for research and development toward an Ebola vaccine doesn't fall to one

federal agency. Many agencies are in the fight against the virus, and those within HHS include the National Institutes of Health.

Both NIH and the Department of Defense have been instrumental in advancing Ebola treatments that now are in advanced stages and being used to care for infected Americans.

As part of Project BioShield, the fledgling Department of Homeland Security created during the Bush administration identified 13 material threats that were to be the focus of countermeasures. One of them was Ebola.

Pharmaceutical companies previously had little incentive to develop vaccines and therapeutics for viruses such as Ebola. Historically, Ebola specifically had killed far fewer people — roughly 1,500 since the disease's discovery in 1976 — than it has in the current outbreak in West Africa.

Cheney's Project BioShield, though, gave companies a financial incentive to get going and guaranteed them a customer: the U.S. government.

“While not ‘perfect’ protection, BioShield is the best program [of its type] America has,” [Steven Bucci](#), a national security and foreign policy expert at The Heritage Foundation, told The Daily Signal.

Bucci, a top Defense Department official during the Bush administration, added:

It provides a layer of defense that should improve every day it is deployed and as we learn more. If it is left fallow, that layer of defense will not improve, and we will become more vulnerable every day.

From 2004 to 2013, funding for Project BioShield was about \$560 million a year. When the original 10-year funding designation expired, Congress passed a measure — the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Reauthorization Act of 2013 — that [authorized](#) up to \$2.8 billion for BioShield from 2014 to 2018.

In the year since the original 10-year appropriation expired, Obama has sought significantly less than the original authorized annual funding. He [requested](#) \$250 million for fiscal 2014 and \$415 million for fiscal 2015.

In the first 10 years, Congress opted to rescind or transfer approximately \$2.3 billion that had been designated for countermeasures to agents of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear terrorism.

Congress [rescinded](#) \$25 million from Project Bioshield, according to a June report from the Congressional Research Service. The lawmakers transferred \$137 million for influenza preparedness and another \$304 million for basic research on biodefense and emerging infectious diseases (including Ebola) at the National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, part of NIH.

The report said the lawmakers also transferred \$1.8 billion to the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, or BARDA, the sub-agency of HHS that oversees Project BioShield contracts.

Over the years, Project BioShield provided roughly \$3.3 billion to acquire medical countermeasures against material threats such as Ebola.

The Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Reauthorization Act, passed last year by Congress, re-upped funding for Project BioShield through 2018. It also gave authority to the HHS secretary to move up to half of that four-year funding, or \$1.4 billion, to BARDA in a single year.



In the Congressional Research Service report examining related issues, science and technology policy specialist Frank Gottron questions the government's use of BioShield funds for other purposes.

"Congressional oversight of such transfers could help ensure that HHS uses Project BioShield appropriations in a manner consistent with congressional intent," Gottron writes.

>>> ['A Little Like a War:' He Treated Ebola in Africa, Now Helps Prepare at Home](#)

President George W. Bush credited Vice President Dick Cheney with advancing the nation's readiness for biological threats such as Ebola. (Photo: Roger L. Wollenberg/Newscom)

Project BioShield and the Bush Administration

From its creation in 2004 until President Bush's departure from office in January 2009, Project BioShield's authority was the basis for research and development of several Ebola treatments.

A review of HHS annual reports turns up multiple grants awarded to companies specifically to research Ebola.

From 2004 to 2006, under BioShield authorities, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [awarded](#) more than \$1.8 million in grants to Apath LLC and Oncovir Inc. to develop antiviral drugs for Ebola infection and advance early treatment of the virus, respectively.

Asked about these two projects, HHS spokeswoman Elleen Kane told The Daily Signal that funding may have been discontinued, since subsequent reports did not mention them. Kane directed inquiries to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which did not respond.

Chertoff's designation of Ebola as a national security threat eight years ago was the basis for a [declaration](#) from HHS Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell three months ago authorizing use of in-vitro diagnostic tests to help detect the virus.

In its annual report for 2007-08, HHS [stated](#) it had invited proposals for development of an Ebola vaccine, a request made possible by Project BioShield.

Similarly, an experimental Ebola vaccine from Johnson & Johnson benefited from BioShield backing. In 2008, NIH awarded a grant worth about \$30 million to a biopharmaceutical company called Crucell,

which Johnson & Johnson later purchased.

[According](#) to Crucell's website, Project BioShield was part of the rationale for developing a vaccine.

>>> [NIH Director Warns of Consequences from Mandatory Quarantines in NY, NJ](#)

Project BioShield and BARDA

The [Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority](#), the agency within HHS that oversees Project BioShield, was created in 2006 under President Bush.

With its attachment to BARDA, the balance of BioShield's 10 years of advanced appropriations became known as the Special Reserve Fund.

BARDA sought to "facilitate the research, development, and acquisition of medical countermeasures for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear agents ...," the agency's draft strategic plan [states](#). It continues:

With NIH basic research and development programs, the newly established BARDA advanced development funding mechanisms, the acquisition support available through the Project BioShield Special Reserve Fund, DSNS assets [a reference to the Centers for Disease Control's Division of Strategic National Stockpile], and appropriations for pandemic influenza countermeasures, HHS now has a comprehensive, end-to-end capability to facilitate the successful advanced development, procurement, and availability of medical countermeasures to increase public health preparedness for responding to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats and emerging infectious diseases, including pandemic influenza.

BARDA's first strategic plan did not outline plans to combat Ebola.

In the agency's 2011-16 [strategic plan](#), however, BARDA Director Robin Robinson specifies Ebola as an emerging threat. Robinson, appointed in 2008, outlines a goal to develop capabilities to "address novel and emerging threats."

The report says:

The Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act charges BARDA with the advanced development of medical countermeasures for emerging infectious disease threats, which come in many forms. New and lethal infectious diseases, such as MRSA, Dengue, Ebola, SARS, and Nipah virus, continue to emerge in nature.

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., was and continues to be a vocal proponent of BARDA and Project Bioshield. Of the role the authority plays in protecting America, Burr told The Daily Signal:

This [Ebola] outbreak reminds us of the human toll the threats we face can take and why we must fully leverage all of the tools at our disposal to quickly advance the medical countermeasures we need to protect the American people. ... Congress put in place critical tools, which we must fully implement and leverage if we are going to be prepared for the full range of threats we may face.



>>> [Here's Why Budget Cuts Have Nothing to Do with Developing an Ebola Vaccine](#)

In 2010, President Obama and HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius both spoke of the threat posed by the Ebola virus. (Photo: Jim Lo Scalzo/Newscom)

Project BioShield and the Obama Administration

In his 2010 State of the Union address, after a year in office, President Obama [announced](#) an initiative to “give us the capacity to respond faster and more effectively to bioterrorism or an infectious disease — a plan that will counter threats at home and strengthen public health abroad.”

Two months later, HHS’s National Biodefense Science Board evaluated a relevant interagency group and made recommendations. The interagency group, called the Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasures Enterprise, oversees BioShield and other efforts to address the government’s need for measures to protect America from chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats.

In its March 2010 [report](#), the National Biodefense Science Board called for reauthorization of BioShield, specifying that it should be “adequately funded.” The science board said the “funds should not be diverted to support other initiatives, regardless of the merit of other purposes.”

The report goes on to list instances where BioShield money was diverted to other projects in 2009 and 2010, the first two years of the Obama administration. It says:

Setting aside the merits of other funding targets, repeated diversions of the Special Reserve Fund raise doubts about the intention of the U.S. government to consistently fund the [medical countermeasures] enterprise over multiple years. Transfers from the [fund] to other entities must be avoided if industry confidence in the U.S. government as a partner is to be fostered.

Congress did allocate more funding to Project BioShield — \$2.8 billion through 2018 — but the Obama administration and lawmakers continue to divert money for other purposes, some unrelated to the mission. The Congressional Research Service addressed that concern in its June report on BioShield to Congress.

Five months after the science board’s recommendations, in August 2010, then-HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius [delivered](#) a speech marking release of an HHS examination of the Public Health Emergency

Medical Countermeasures Enterprise, the interagency group.

>>> **Heading to the Doctor or Emergency Room? Prepare to Be Pre-Screened for Ebola**

Sebelius announced a plan creating, among other things, a “strategic investment fund” for new countermeasure technologies.

Joined by Anthony Fauci, director of NIH’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases; Tom Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and Robinson, the BARDA director, Sebelius specifically addressed the government’s increased focus on medical countermeasures.

She cited a potential Ebola outbreak as cause for due diligence in developing such measures:

Right now, there’s little incentive for private companies to produce medical countermeasures for rare conditions, like Ebola virus or exposure to non-medical radiation. And yet, in the event of an Ebola outbreak or nuclear explosion, these countermeasures would be critical.

The goal of the HHS plan, Sebelius said, was to “add more life-saving products to the pipeline, enabling critical programs like BioShield to work the way they are supposed to.”

According to HHS annual reports on Project BioShield, however, the Obama administration hasn’t used any of the initiative’s funds to back grants for development of an Ebola vaccine.

In fact, in its June report, the Congressional Research Service points to “countermeasure prioritization” as an issue for Congress to consider.

“The Project BioShield contracts have not been used to acquire countermeasures against all of the material threats determined by DHS,” the report says, referring to the Department of Homeland Security.

>>> **States Have Legal Authority to Quarantine Citizens Exposed to Ebola**

Of the total \$3.3 billion budgeted for medical countermeasures from 2004 to 2014, 90 percent, or \$3 billion, went to address just three threats: anthrax, smallpox and botulinum (which can cause botulism).

No countermeasures funding went to the remaining 11 chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats identified by the Department of Homeland Security, including Ebola.

“It does not matter if the threatening pathogen is a natural one like Ebola is today, or a weaponized one from some former Soviet scientist, we need to constantly upgrade our defenses,” Heritage’s Bucci said. “Failing to make that investment is just wrong.”

In September and October, though, the Obama administration did authorize funding under BARDA to develop two Ebola vaccines as the outbreak spread throughout West Africa and four people in the U.S. were diagnosed with the disease.

“The Ebola outbreak in West Africa underscores how medical and public health preparedness and response programs, especially BARDA’s medical countermeasure work, are a matter of national security,” Burr said. “It’s not enough to prioritize this work only in the matter of crisis.”

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